



A Publication of C.J.F. Ministries and Messianic Perspectives Radio Network

Messianic Perspectives[®]

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.

Post Office Box 345, San Antonio, Texas 78292-0345

Elul-Tishri-Cheshvan 5769-5770 / September-October 2009



by Dr. Gary Hedrick & Elizabeth Nowotny

“How do you prepare six billion people for the end of the world?” That’s the question asked in a trailer for the highly anticipated movie *2012*, opening later this year. The film, directed by Roland Emmerich and starring John Cusack and other notable Hollywood luminaries (see sonypictures.com/movies/2012), calls attention to future events—most of which occur in December 2012, the year some people believe will mark the end of the world.

The Year 2012

No one disputes that 2012 is shaping up to be a landmark year:

- The United States, France, Finland, Mexico, and South Korea are just a few of the many countries that will hold presidential elections that year.
- London is the site of the 2012 Summer Olympics, and Queen Elizabeth II’s Diamond Jubilee yearlong celebration that will include festivities throughout the United Kingdom.
- The US is slated to cede wartime control of the Republic of Korea military and dissolve the Combined Forces Command after 50 years.

- NASA estimates that the asteroid Eros—the second largest Near Earth Object on record (13x13x33 km)—is expected to miss Earth by only 0.1790 astronomical units (26,778,019 km or 16.1 million miles) in January of 2012 (see nssdc.gsfc.nasa.gov/planetary/factsheet/neofact.html).

- And, Intel and Silicon Graphics are set to complete work on a Supercomputer—dubbed Pleiades by its designers—for NASA’s Ames Research Center. Pleiades is expected to reach a peak performance of 10 Petaflops, or 10 quadrillion operations per second, making it the world’s third-fastest computer (see nas.nasa.gov/News/Releases/2008/05-07-08.html).

But what about Emmerich’s doomsday story line in *2012*—should we regard it as fact or fiction? And what about the fact that many Christians are jumping on the 2012 bandwagon and claiming that it will be a prophetically significant year? Much of the hullabaloo is due to a series of programs airing on the History Channel (*Doomsday 2012: The End of Days* [2007], *Mayan Doomsday Prophecy* [2006], *Last Days on Earth* [2006], *Seven Signs of the Apocalypse* [2009], and *Nostradamus 2012* [2009]).

Why do some people believe the world will end in 2012? What are the facts? What are the theories? And how do these facts and theories line up with what the Bible says? Let's begin by taking a look at how a civilization that lived many centuries ago continues to exert its influence today.

The Mayan Calendar

The Mayans were a people known for their advanced writing, mathematics, and astronomy. They lived in Mesoamerica for centuries—with their Classic period dating from AD 250 to 900. Their religious practices were brutal, primitive, and included human sacrifice; however, their level of scientific and mathematical understanding was nothing short of remarkable. Among other advances, they developed an amazingly accurate system of calendars that continues to be studied even today. According to students of this great civilization, the “Great Cycle” of the “Long Count” Mayan calendar equates to 5,125 years. Based

on these calculations, the current Great Cycle began on August 11, 3114 BC, and will be completed on the winter solstice of December 21, 2012.

However, the Mayan calendar theory (with its corresponding dates) isn't really quite as cut-and-dried as it may seem. In reality, the Maya actually used several calendars—including a 260-day calendar based on the average length of human gestation (the *Tzolkin*), a 365-day calendar based on the annual cycles of the sun (*Haab*), and even a calendar based on the cycles of Venus. Scholars have been trying for decades to synch the Mayan reckoning of time with our modern Gregorian calendar, but with only limited success. There are numerous theories, and no one knows for sure which one (if any of them) is precisely right.

In its current form, the 2012 doomsday theory is based on the work of one expert, Joseph T. Goodman (1838-1917), who devised the first version of “correlation #584283” in 1905. In the 1930s, and again in the 1950s, Goodman's calculations were revised by three days to pinpoint the beginning and ending of the Great Cycle with the dates we mentioned earlier in 3114 BC and AD 2012, respectively. But again, the problem is that numerous correlations have been proposed between the Mayan calendar(s) and our modern calendar. The 2012 doomsters base their theory on only one of them, with no conclusive proof that it's the right one.

Even more importantly, there is no indication whatsoever that the Maya viewed 2012 as the end of the world! It is perfectly reasonable to assume that the end of the current Great Cycle would have simply marked, in their way of thinking, the beginning of a new cycle—and they saw no urgency in devising a calendar for yet



another cycle that wouldn't begin for more than a thousand years. Contrary to what the doomsters would have us believe, the ancient Maya would have relished the successful completion of a Great Cycle as an occasion for great joy and celebration—not fear and trepidation. It's a classic argument from silence; that is, since one of the Mayan calendars appears to stop abruptly in the year 2012, that must mean they thought that year would mark the end of the world—even though the Mayans themselves never said so.

Nonetheless, the 2012 doomsters take the ball and run with it, building on the Mayan notion that the current Great Cycle ends in December of 2012. Mayan scholars, such as Sandra Noble (executive director of the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies in Crystal River, Florida), are criticizing attempts to link the end of the Long Count calendar to any kind of doomsday or end of the world catastrophe.

In a 2007 article about the correlation between the Mayan calendar and a 2012 apocalypse, Noble told *USA Today*, “For the ancient Maya, it was a huge celebration to make it to the end of a whole cycle. To render December



Messianic Perspectives®

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Messianic Perspectives is published bimonthly by C/JF Ministries, P.O. Box 345, San Antonio, Texas 78292-0345, a 501(c)3 Texas nonprofit corporation: Dr. Gary Hedrick, President; Brian Nowotny, Director of Communications; Rachel Zanardi, Editor; Erastos Leiloglou, Designer. Subscription price: \$10 per year. The publication of articles by other authors does not necessarily imply full agreement with all the views expressed therein. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Visit us online at www.cjfm.org. Toll-free OrderLine: (800) 926-5397. © 2009 by C/JF Ministries. All rights reserved.

21, 2012 as a doomsday or moment of cosmic shifting is a complete fabrication and a chance for a lot of people to cash in" (G. Jeffrey MacDonald, "Does Maya calendar predict 2012 apocalypse?" [*USA Today*, 3/27/07]).

Journalist Lawrence Joseph's book, *Apocalypse 2012: A Scientific Investigation into Civilization's End*, claims that part of the 2012 predictions stem from the way the stars will be configured that year. On the 2012 winter solstice, the sun will be aligned with the center of the Milky Way for the first time in about 26,000 years, and according to Joseph, ". . . whatever energy typically streams to Earth from the center of the Milky Way will indeed be disrupted on 12/21/12 at 11:11 p.m. Universal Time." This leads us into our next theory.

Galactic Alignment

If you want to make something silly sound reasonable, just give it a scientific-sounding name. That's what the doomsters and others have done here. Much of this idea of "galactic alignment" (and its supposed consequences) is just downright ridiculous. According to software-engineer-turned-author John Major Jenkins, galactic alignment is a rarely occurring intersection of Earth, sun, and galactic equator. In his 2002 book *Galactic Alignment: The Transformation of Consciousness According to Mayan, Egyptian, and Vedic Traditions*, Jenkins says he believes that the classical Mayans anticipated this alignment and thought it would signal a profound transition for mankind.

But astronomers point out that this alignment actually covers a 36-year period (corresponding to the diameter of the sun), and began in 1998 with a convergence that was even more precise than the one that's expected in 2012. There were no dire consequences from the alignment 11 years ago, so there's no reason to expect 2012 to be any different. Jean Meeus, an astronomer and meteorologist from the University of Leuven in Belgium, confirms the bogus nature of these alignment fears in his book, *Mathematical Astronomy Morsels* ("Ecliptic and Galactic Equator." Richmond, VA: Willmann-Bell Publishers, 1997; ISBN 0-943396-51-4).

Another prominent expert, Anthony Aveni, an archeoastronomer and professor at Colgate, scoffs at the very idea of galactic alignment: "I defy anyone to look up into the sky and see the galactic equator. . . . You need a radio telescope for that, and

[radio telescopes] were not known anywhere in the world that I've heard of until the 1930s" (Benjamin Anastas, "The Final Days" [*New York Times Magazine*, 7/1/07]). Yet 2012 apologists continue to claim that the ancient Maya somehow knew about it—even though there's no way they could have seen it.

Some extremists and alarmists go so far as to say that the so-called "galactic alignment" will cause a pole shift with ensuing mass destruction all over the planet. According to Dr. David Morrison, senior scientist for astrobiology at NASA Headquarters in Washington, DC, this is nothing more than an urban legend making its rounds on the Web:

This is an Internet hoax, with no basis in fact. There is no alignment of planets or of the Sun with the Galaxy. As far as being in the center of the Galaxy, this is impossible; we are slowly orbiting the galactic center at a distance of about 30,000 light years. The idea of a "pole shift" is also unfounded. Most people seem to mean a rapid change in the rotational pole of the Earth, but this is something that has never happened and never will. Some people are confusing this with the reversal of the magnetic poles on Earth, which does take place regularly, every few hundred thousand years. But there is no evidence that this might happen soon, and even if it did, the magnetic shift would be gradual and there would probably be no consequences on the planet, certainly nothing catastrophic (see astrobiology.nasa.gov/ask-an-astrobiologist/faq).

Venus

The doomsters also play fast and loose with the facts relating to their emphasis on Venus' role in the presumed 2012 alignment. It is indeed interesting that 2012 will be the year we will witness Venus' second and last solar transit of this century (the next one won't occur until 2117 and 2125). It is also true that Venus fascinated the Maya, probably because it is one of the brightest objects in the night sky—and we already mentioned that Venus was the basis for one of their calendars. However, how does any of this confirm a doomsday scenario? Answer: it doesn't.



Retired NASA physicist Dr. David P. Stern writes: “The only thing which makes 2012 special, to my thinking, is that Venus will pass in front of the Sun. Such transits occur in pairs, generally more than a century apart. Venus was very important to the Maya, but as it happens, the transit occurs in mid-summer, on June 6” (see eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/transit/venus0412.html).

So, the role Venus supposedly plays in the 2012 phenomenon occurs in the summer—six and a half months before the winter solstice—but for some reason, the doomsters leave that part out.

Nostradamus and the 2012 Comet

Michel de Nostredame (known more commonly by the Latinized version of his name, Nostradamus), was a well-known figure of the French Renaissance. He was an apothecary, but is better known for his reputation for being able to foresee the future. Nostradamus published collections of prophecies that have attained worldwide popularity—especially in recent decades. He is best known for his work *Les Propheties* (*The Prophecies*), which first appeared in 1555. Nostradamus

wrote in his native French in a poetic style, separating his prophecies into “quatrains,” or verses consisting of four lines each.

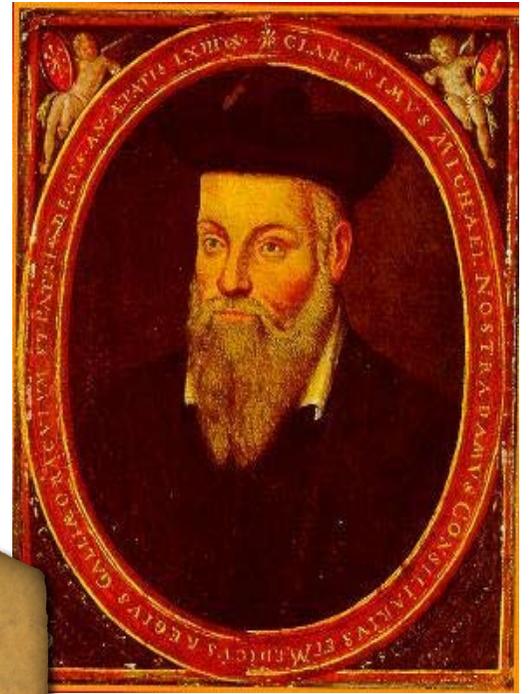
Enthusiasts who follow Nostradamus’ prophecies credit him with predicting major world events throughout history—everything ranging from the Great Fire of London, to Napoleon, to Hitler, to the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. Many of them also say that Nostradamus was able to foresee devastation and destruction for both Earth and mankind in the year 2012. Here are two of the doomsters’ favorite proof texts:

*After great misery for mankind
an even greater one approaches,
when the great cycle of the
centuries is renewed. It will rain
blood, milk, famine, war and
disease. In the sky will be seen a
fire, dragging a tail of sparks.*

(Nostradamus, Century ii, Quatrain 46)

*Mabus will soon die and
there will happen a dreadful
destruction of people and
animals. Suddenly, vengeance
will appear, a hundred hands,
thirst and hunger, when the comet
passes.*

(Nostradamus, Century ii, Quatrain 62)



Many of the seer’s fans link these statements—as well as others—to a 2012 comet (“a fire, dragging a tail of sparks”) approaching or striking the Earth, causing devastating famines, diseases, natural disasters, and war.

However, there are insurmountable difficulties with most, if not all of Nostradamus’ purported “prophecies”—including those linked to 2012. Consider, for example, the fact that Nostradamus nowhere mentions the end of the world—not once in all of his writings. The doomsters believe it is implied in some passages, but it is nowhere explicitly stated. Neither does Nostradamus ever make a specific reference to the year 2012, or even more generally to the 21st century.

Also, there have been instances where overzealous followers of the French seer have taken liberties with the translation from French to help “clarify” his prophecies.

In his book *The Mask of Nostradamus: The Prophecies of the World’s Most Famous Seer* (Amhurst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1993), James Randi suggests that modern-day supporters have largely manufactured Nostradamus’ reputation as a prophet. Nostradamus’ words are placed into events that have either already occurred, or are so imminent that they are inevitable—a process sometimes known as “retroactive clairvoyance” or “postdiction” (rather than prediction). He also shows that some



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Nostradamus translations are flat-out fraudulent because they stray so far from what he actually wrote.

It is important to note that there is no evidence in the academic literature to suggest that any Nostradamus quatrain has ever been interpreted as predicting a specific event before it occurred—other than in vague, general terms that could equally apply to any number of other events. So here's what we have to ask ourselves: why hasn't anyone ever noticed one of these prophesied events before it happened? If Nostradamus really wrote a quatrain about it, why didn't anyone warn us ahead of time about 9/11? Why do these revelations always seem to come after the fact?

In some ways, it's like the widely used Rorschach personality test, where someone is shown a page smeared with random inkblots and then asked to describe what he or she sees. One person can look at the page and see a horse or puppy while someone else examines the very same page and sees a Ferris wheel or coffee mug. Likewise, two people can read the same Nostradamus quatrain and arrive at two entirely different interpretations, depending on what each of them is inclined to see. (For more information from a secular and reasonably objective perspective, see *The Unknown Nostradamus: 500th Anniversary Biography* by Peter Lemesurier [Hampshire, United Kingdom: O Books, 2003], ISBN 10: 1903816327.)

The underlying genius of the Nostradamus "prophecies" is their brilliant ambiguity. That is, the quatrains are written in a way that makes it easy

for the reader—if he is so inclined—to take events that have already occurred and read them back into the passage. If the world survives the year 2012 (as it undoubtedly will), someone will find that little tidbit prophesied in his writings, too. Maybe it'll be in an obscure passage where Nostradamus wrote something that sounds like a warning against heeding a false alarm. The possibilities are as voluminous as this famous Frenchman's writings.

So, all of this begs the question: what should be our position on the 2012 doomsday predictions?

A Biblical Perspective

Why are so many Bible believers hoodwinked by doomsday movements? They willingly "drink the Kool-Aid," as it were, without realizing what they're doing. Well, in a way, it's understandable! There's a built-in apocalyptic dimension of our faith that's inescapable. Much of the Bible presents an "end of days" theme. It presents the history of the world as moving steadily toward a conclusion that's marked by the return of Jesus the Messiah to this Earth. So when someone stands up and says the end is near, we respond almost instinctively. We want to hear what he has to say.

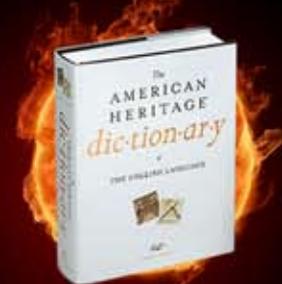
We witnessed this phenomenon in the 1990s, when the Y2Kers were warning the world about a computer glitch that might bring the world to an end on January 1, 2000. It wasn't long before Christian leaders far and wide, including such notables as Dr. James Dobson (Focus on the Family) and the late Bill Bright (Campus Crusade),

APOCALYPTIC BELIEFS

Apocalypticism used to be defined as a revelation of God's will, but society today has expanded its definition.



Encyclopedia Britannica defines apocalypticism as, "Eschatological (end-time) views and movements that focus on cryptic revelations about a sudden, dramatic, and cataclysmic intervention of God in history; the judgment of all men; the salvation of the faithful elect; and the eventual rule of the elect with God in a renewed heaven and earth. . . ."



The American Heritage Dictionary has a more concise definition: "Belief in apocalyptic prophecies, especially regarding the imminent destruction of the world and the foundation of a new world order as a result of the triumph of good over evil."



Random House Dictionary offers this: "1. any doctrine concerning the end of the temporal world, esp. one based on the supposed prophetic passages in the Revelation of St. John the Divine. 2. the millennial doctrine of the Second Advent and personal reign of Jesus Christ on earth."

were sounding the alarm about the potentially devastating effects of the dreaded “computer bug.” The Christian public was spoon-fed a steady diet of misinformation and paranoia for the final year leading up to January 2000 (Y2K).

But as it turned out, nothing happened. Y2K came and went with barely a whimper. Christians around the world had spent millions of dollars and countless hours of precious time, preparing for something that turned out to be a non-event. We are susceptible to deceptions like this because biblical faith, by its very nature, is apocalyptic. The Bible itself is apocalyptic. It says our world is a battleground and that all of history is weaving its way toward a climactic showdown between good and evil.

We believe that divine intervention is an absolute moral and eschatological necessity. Evil cannot be allowed to wreak havoc in the world indefinitely. Apocalyptic references are not confined to the Bible. In the Dead

Sea Scrolls, we find references to the “sons of light” who battle the “sons of darkness” at the end of time (*War Scroll*, fragments 1QM, 4Q491-496).

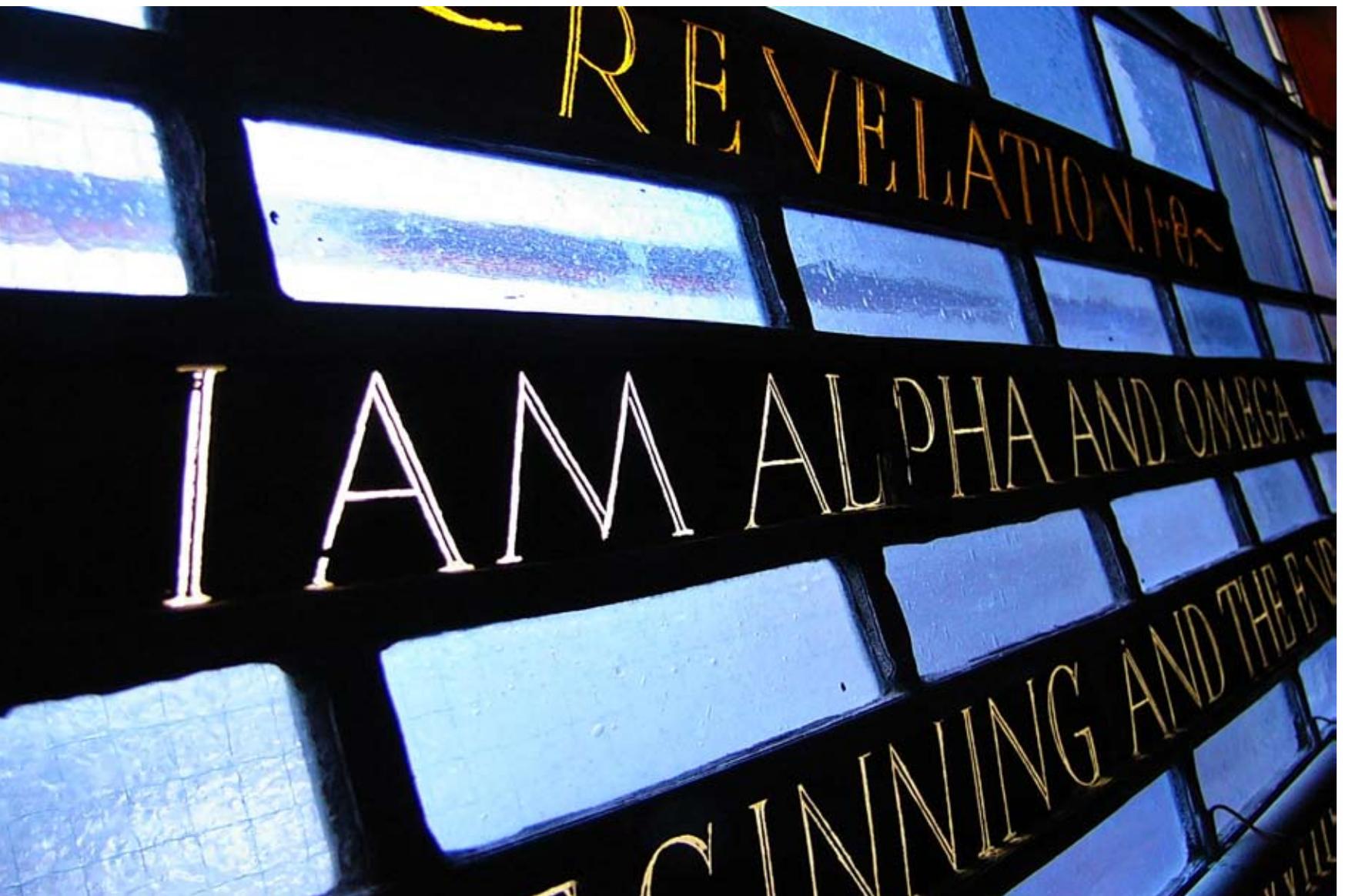
So here’s our predicament. What is to be done with an end-time mindset that comes with problems? We can jettison the problematic mindset—similar to what Christian preterists have done. I suppose that would provide a measure of protection from the “doomsday” deceptions that arise every few years. But it creates an even bigger problem because it marks a tragic retreat from one of the Bible’s central themes—namely, Messiah’s future advent and His redemption of all creation (see Romans 8:19-25).

Abandoning our prophetic viewpoint, then, is not an option. We are not going to throw out the premillennial baby with the sensationalist/extremist bath water. We cannot lay aside our “blessed hope” without losing an essential component of who we are as believers in Messiah Yeshua (see Titus 2:13).

The question is this: can we maintain our zeal for the Second Coming while avoiding the pitfalls of extremism? I believe we can—that is, if we’ll be diligent in three specific areas.

1. Keeping it factual.

Prophecy has become a big business in evangelicalism. Hal Lindsey’s *Late Great Planet Earth* was first published in the late 1960s and has sold millions of copies. In an effort to tap into the revenue stream (or maybe simply to draw attention to themselves), some fringe writers have resorted to exaggeration and distortion. Back in the early 1990s, for instance, one Pentecostal church leader claimed to have been granted a personal audience with the Antichrist in a secretive desert palace somewhere in the Middle East. The Antichrist even performed a miracle for him—just to show that he meant business! This preacher later provided a long, detailed account of the meeting in one of his publications. That account ultimately proved to be his undoing because it contained



inconsistencies and factual errors that didn't stand up to scrutiny.

We have already seen that the 2012 doomsters are on shaky ground on numerous counts. They typically employ the scattergun approach, appealing to multiple sources (like Nostradamus, Mother Shipton, the Mayans, Merlin, ancient Chinese sages, and even a Native American chieftain, just to name a few). Then they say, in effect, "With this many sources, there must be something to it."

The catch, however, is that most of the doomsters' sources are irrelevant, misconstrued, or just outright wrong. If an attorney presents a huge pile of evidence in a court of law, but no single item in that evidentiary heap is true or relevant, he hasn't really helped his case. It's like one ancient Jewish proverb says: "A thousand times zero still equals zero."

As believers, we should always be careful to speak the truth (see Matthew 5:37). God himself places a premium on truth: "*He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He*" (Deut. 32:4).

This is why I have never understood the proliferation of "Christian" urban legends on the Web—like the stories about Charles Darwin's supposed deathbed conversion, or about NASA computers confirming Joshua's story about a missing day. Who sits at home in front of a computer monitor and invents these stories? What in the world are they thinking while they're doing it? As believers in the Lord Jesus, shouldn't we hold ourselves to a higher standard of truthfulness and authenticity? Sad to say, atheists and skeptics on the Web have taken note of the many Christian urban legends circulating in cyberspace (see www.religioustolerance.org). To them, it's yet another indication that Christians can't be trusted and that the Gospel itself isn't true. How sad!

We should keep it real so we can maintain some semblance of credibility before a watching world (see 1 Peter 3:15).

2. Keeping it biblical.

The Apostle Paul told young Timothy to "rightly divide"—that is, to correctly interpret—the Word of truth (see 2 Timothy 2:15). In talking about a "right" way to interpret the Bible,



Paul infers that there is also a wrong way. In another passage, Peter warns that some people "twist" Scripture and change its meaning (see 2 Peter 3:16). So there are definitely right and wrong ways to interpret the Bible.

Now, I am fully aware that in our post-modern culture, it's not in vogue to talk about "right" and "wrong" interpretations. We're not supposed to express ourselves in such absolute terms anymore. Many Bible study guides these days simply quote a verse or two and then ask, "What did this passage mean to you?" But Paul and Peter obviously believed there are right and wrong interpretations—and they didn't hesitate to say so.

We're not talking here about a misinformed or off-the-wall dogmatism, but rather about our confidence in the truthfulness of God's word and our responsibility to expound on it accurately. We should be able and willing

to stand up and say, "Thus saith the Lord. . . ."

This means we should strive to engage in *exegesis* (that is, extracting the divinely intended meaning *from* a passage) rather than *eisegesis* (inserting our own ideas *into* that passage). Such an endeavor requires that we employ sound principles of biblical interpretation (hermeneutics)—and that takes work. You may not realize it, but your pastor may spend up to an hour of study time for every minute he's at the pulpit! There are no shortcuts in the Lord's work—and our teaching must be based squarely on the Bible.

3. Keeping it practical.

The study of prophecy is eminently practical. If it ever becomes a navel-contemplating exercise, with no relevance to our daily lives, then we've missed the whole point.

The Apostle Peter, in his final epistle, puts it this way:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness (2 Peter 3:10-11).

This is “Practical Christianity 101,” and each of us has to personally apply it every day. If we really believe the Lord is on His way back to this Earth, that conviction will impact the way we live. It will dictate our practices, our priorities, and our passions.

When people ask us if we think the Lord will return in 2012, we should tell them we hope and pray that He comes before then! We’re listening for the trumpet blast now, not waiting to hear it three years from now (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16). We’re not interested in a goofy, half-baked prophetic theory that says we have to wait until 2012. And if today isn’t the day, we can hope it will be tomorrow, or maybe

the day after that. The cry of every redeemed heart should be, “Come, Lord Jesus!” (see Revelation 22:20).

Ironically, the fact that there’s so much talk about the possibility of the Rapture taking place in 2012—marking the beginning of the Tribulation—is in itself a strong indication that 2012 won’t be the year. The Lord Yeshua the Messiah said that His coming will be a complete surprise to most people (see 1 Thessalonians 5:2-4). It will happen when it’s least expected—not when everyone is talking about it and Hollywood is making movies about the end of the world.

The truth is that we don’t know the date of His return. No one does. It could be tonight while we’re in our beds, or it could be 10 years from now. Maybe someday we’ll find out that Sir Isaac Newton’s date of AD 2060 was the right one!

However much longer the Lord delays His coming, our study of the prophetic Word should produce the fruit of holiness and godliness in our lives. *How long* we wait for His return isn’t nearly as important as *how* we wait. And even if the Lord doesn’t come in our

lifetime, we’ll spend the rest of our days expectantly and joyfully serving Him!

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior [Yeshua the Messiah] (Titus 2:11-13).

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Bible Questions AND Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK



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QUESTION: *I'm reading [a certain preacher's] commentary on Revelation, and he says Revelation 14:20 should be taken literally to mean that at the Battle of Armageddon, blood will flow in the Valley of Megiddo up to the height of a horse's bridle. He includes detailed calculations to "prove" that it could happen. I'm retired now, but my training was in mathematics and engineering—and this man's figures just don't look right to me. I believe it's symbolic language, but my friends at church say I'm just too much of a skeptic. What do you think?*

ANSWER: I'm with you on this one. Here's the verse in question: "And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs" (Rev. 14:20).

We are literalists when it comes to our interpretation of Scripture, but we still recognize symbolism when it occurs. The imagery of horses wading neck-deep in blood can be found in numerous ancient Jewish sources. It's an example of hyperbole—that is, using deliberate exaggeration to make a point.

The Book of 1 Enoch, for example, uses a similar expression: "The horse shall walk through the blood of sinners up to his chest . . ." (see 1 Enoch 100:3).

One ancient rabbinic source includes this statement: "They [the Romans under Hadrian] slew the inhabitants [of Betar, after Bar-Kosiba, its defender, had been killed] until the horses waded in blood up to the nostrils . . ." (see Lamentations Rabbah 2:2:4).

If we were going to take Revelation 14:20 in a strictly literal sense, consistency would require that we interpret the entire verse literally. That would mean the "blood" came from crushed grapes and flowed from a winepress located outside the city of Jerusalem, covering the entire country to a depth of four feet or so ("1,600 furlongs" is 300 kilometers or 180 miles, roughly the distance from the northernmost point in Israel to its southern tip).

In my opinion, it is more reasonable to take this reference as a figure of speech—conveying the idea that divine judgment will result in unprecedented bloodshed and death in Israel during the Tribulation Period.

QUESTION: *How do you explain the contradictions between the genealogies of Jesus given in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke?*

ANSWER: First of all, it's important to understand that ancient Jewish genealogies differed in the form they took. There were both ascending and descending genealogies; also, while some were segmented, others were linear. Genealogies also varied in depth—that is, they varied in the number of generations included. Most of the time, they were not meant to be comprehensive. It was a common practice to skip generations, depending on the genealogy's purpose (e.g., to establish inheritance rights, citizenship, or even the legal right of a king to rule).

In ascending genealogies, the Hebrew word *ben* can mean either "son," or a more distant descendant (in Genesis 29:5, it denotes Laban, who was actually Nahor's grandson). Likewise, in descending genealogies, the Hebrew word *av* can mean either "father" or a more distant ancestor.

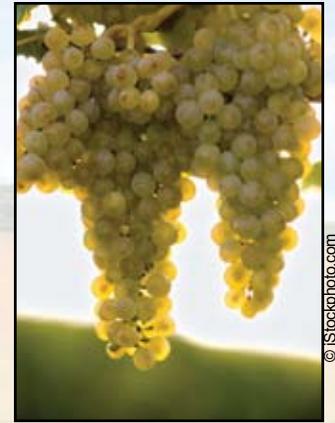
. . . it is more reasonable to take this reference as a figure of speech—conveying the idea that divine judgment will result in unprecedented bloodshed and death in Israel during the Tribulation Period.

For example, when Matthew says that Joram was the "father" of Uzziah (see Matthew 1:9)—also known as Azariah—he's actually skipping three generations (compare to 1 Chronicles 3:10-12). We also know (by comparing other OT accounts) that the four generations from Perez to Amminadab spanned roughly 450 years—so there are obviously gaps at that point in the genealogy (because we would ordinarily expect four generations to encompass less than 200 years). The only people who have a problem with any of this are modern readers who are unfamiliar with the nature, character, and purpose of genealogies in ancient Israel.

But let's apply a little common sense here. If the genealogies in Matthew and Luke were identical, then one of them would have been unnecessary. And since

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Fruit from the Harvest



by Violette Berger

To the Jew First (Romans 1:16)

Peter Parkas, CJFM missionary (New Jersey), spends a portion of his time ministering in New York City. He distributes Gospel tracts, evangelizes on New York City's streets, and—as the Lord leads—meets one-on-one with unsaved Jewish people who are open to hearing the Good News of Messiah. He meets many unsaved Jewish people while ministering at churches. After sharing his testimony at a recent church service, Peter met “Gary,” an unsaved Jewish man. Gary's good friend “Ed” brought him to the church service—Ed had been faithfully witnessing to Gary for a full year. Gary was open to the Gospel message, but he could not understand how he could believe in Jesus and still be Jewish. Peter responded, “Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. So, what could be more Jewish than to believe in Him? Besides, if He is not the Jewish Messiah, then He was a liar and nobody should believe in Him.”

Peter and Gary agreed to stay in touch by phone for more in-depth discussions. Gary then visited a church where Peter was scheduled to be the guest speaker. Gary attended the Sunday school class Peter taught on “The Jewish Covenants,” and the church service in which Peter delivered a message on “End Times.” A few days later, Gary prayed to receive his Jewish Messiah. Gary said, “Peter's ministry deeply touched him, and that Peter was the final impetus in his salvation decision.” Peter writes, “Ed continues to disciple Gary; Gary and I still stay in touch, and he is wholeheartedly following the Lord. This is such an encouragement to me, and I receive great joy when I think of Gary.”

And Also to the Greek (Romans 1:16)

CJFM missionary Richard Toviah (Phoenix) shares a providential encounter from a recent visit with his mother in Calgary, Canada. Richard took time to volunteer at the Flea Market Ministry, which he had helped manage when he lived in Calgary. This ministry is an outreach to everyone, but especially to Jewish people—offering free tracts, books, and a full-time missionary from a Jewish mission organization. As Richard was preparing to lock up at the end of the day, “Frank” stopped by and began conversing with Richard.

As they began discussing spiritual matters, Richard asked Frank two diagnostic questions from Dr. D. James Kennedy's *Evangelism Explosion* plan: (1) “If you were to die tonight, do you have the assurance that you would go to heaven?” (2) “What would you say if you were to stand before the Lord, and He were to ask you, ‘Why should I let you in?’ ” Frank replied that he does more good than bad, and hopes that would be enough to get him into Heaven. Richard then asked if he knew the Ten Commandments. As Richard recited them, Frank admitted that he had already broken three and agreed he probably wouldn't fair too well on the Day of Judgment. Next, Richard asked Frank if he had heard of the Gospel and knew what it meant, to which Frank responded, “No.”

Richard shared the entire Gospel message, the “Good News,” and then asked Frank if he would like to receive this free gift of faith. Frank responded, “Who wouldn't want this?” Richard and Frank held hands as Frank prayed to repent and receive Jesus as his Lord and Savior. Richard writes, “I'm not sure who shed more tears, Frank or I. I left the Flea Market Ministry, and Canada, full of praise to the Lord.”

More Joy

Richard Toviah continues to praise the Lord for the salvation of lost souls. While leading a messianic Passover Seder at a congregation in Mesa, Arizona, five members of a Hispanic family responded to his invitation to receive the Lord. He later had a unique experience while at a Passover Seder with a predominantly Navajo congregation. The pastor's wife helped interpret the Passover using the Navajo language and Bible translation, and six Navajo individuals prayed to receive the Lord at the end of the service.

And Also to the Youth

Richard Hill, CJFM missionary (Las Vegas), was recently invited to be one of three guest speakers at a youth rally with an audience comprised of 200-300 youth. The outreach event included dramatic skits, worship music, and a three-fold theme: repentance, the Gospel, and how to live a holy life. Richard taught on the Gospel of Jesus, using John 3 as his text—where Nicodemus asked Jesus how a person could be “born again.”

After the message, Rich gave an invitation and asked for a show of hands from everyone who had prayed the sinner's prayer. Hands rose throughout the auditorium, and these young people were invited to come forward. Rich said that he was "inundated with youth and could not count them all." Between him and another pastor, they safely estimated that 70 youth came to know Jesus that night.

Rich adds, "Pastors came forward to join me in praying for these new believers as they begin their new life in Messiah. We were all intrigued as to how God orchestrated the entire rally. The first topic of repentance prompted the youth to think about their sin, the consequences of sin, and the need to turn from sin. Next, the Gospel was preached so they knew to turn to Jesus. The final teaching was on how to live the holy life after receiving Jesus. In all the years of our ministry, we never had a day in the Lord like this—hallelujah!"

On the same day, Richard Hill had also conducted a messianic Passover Seder at a senior-care facility. Richard's wife, Oanh, talked with an 86-year-old Jewish man, and explained why Yeshua is the Lamb of God. She had the privilege of leading him to the Lord, and this added blessing brought the total number of souls saved that day to 71! "***This is the day the LORD has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it***" (Psalm 118:24).

Israelis at the Mall

As another aspect of his ministry, **CJFM missionary Brian Zuckerman (Las Vegas)** focuses on ministering in shopping malls. He learned, early on, that wearing his shirt with the words, "Jesus loves you" imprinted inside a Star of David created many opportunities to engage in discourses on spiritual matters. In separate instances one day, Brian met three curious young Israelis and had great conversations that allowed him to share the Gospel message with each of them. It was "Avi," however, with whom he had a more in-depth discussion.

Brian explained through the Levitical system that in order to have fellowship with God, animal sacrifices were required to cover Israel's sin. He continued with God's new covenant promise in Jeremiah 31, and pointed out, "It is Yeshua (Jesus) who establishes the *new* covenant by cleansing us from all sin—not simply covering sin as the animal sacrifices did. It is His blood atonement that cleanses sin from those of us who receive this priceless gift of faith." Brian asks that we please pray for Avi, and for more opportunities to share with him.

Hasidim on Campus

During his outreach ministry on the Ohio State University campus, **CJFM missionary Eric Chabot (Columbus)** has been provided many opportunities to discuss spiritual issues with Jewish students from diverse backgrounds. He was, therefore, not surprised when four Hasidic Jewish students approached him. Eric writes, "The *Chabad-Lubavitch* Hasidic movement adheres to the same view of Messiah as that of

Moses Maimonides—the most celebrated Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages (1135-1204). Maimonides wrote that the Messiah was not divine, and He did not die and rise from the dead to make atonement for our sins. This was exactly what I heard in our talk with these Hasidic students as they rejected our explanation of Messiah, saying it was impossible for Jesus to be the Messiah."

Eric told the students how the Bible and other Jewish writings give a basis for a suffering, or atoning, Messiah. He adds, "When I read from Isaiah 53—where the Bible says the Messiah would be rejected by his own people—they seemed confused. After talking with them for over an hour, we departed on somewhat friendly terms, and I praise God for the opportunity to plant seeds."

More Divine Appointments

While distributing tracts outside the University of New Orleans library, **CJFM missionary Michelle Beadle (New Orleans)** was quite surprised when a student actually *asked* for a tract. After he finished reading it, Michelle was interested in hearing his thoughts. He told her that he thought it was wonderful that she was on campus learning what students believed. When Michelle asked him about his spiritual background, he told her that he was a Buddhist and had never read the Bible. When she offered him a copy, he said that he was too busy to read it while studying and preparing for his dental school interview the next day.

Michelle then asked if she could pray for him. When she finished, he asked, "Can I give you a hug?" Michelle writes, "He gave me a huge bear hug and expressed how thankful he was for the prayer. He told me, 'I've never had anyone pray for me before. I will never forget this time.' I asked again if I could give him a Bible, and this time he said, 'yes' and promised he would read it that evening. God was so good to lead me to someone who really needed encouragement, prayer, and a Bible. It was truly a divine appointment!"

After leading the first portion of a Messiah in the Passover Seder in Tennessee, **CJFM missionary Michael Campo (Chicago)** found himself enjoying the company of a lovely couple during dinner—only to discover that they were both Jewish. Michael notes, "I don't believe that there is a large Jewish population in Tennessee, but I do believe God brought these two for me to meet." While witnessing to them, he noticed that the woman was more interested and willing to listen. He asked her, "What is keeping you from believing and trusting that Jesus is your Messiah?"

"Her answer was honest," Michael writes. "I appreciated it when she said, 'I haven't made up my mind.' Similar to those to whom Paul spoke, some believed, some mocked, and others were willing to hear more. Her answer was encouraging because most are unwilling." Please pray that her search ends with faith in her Jewish Messiah.

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God is the ultimate economizer of space, logic dictates that the differences between the genealogies must be purposeful. When we study them in detail, it becomes apparent that the two royal genealogies are complementary, not contradictory—and that their distinctive features are rich in meaning and significance.

Matthew's account, for example, presents Yeshua (Jesus) of Nazareth as the "Son of David" (this title occurs numerous times in Matthew), and also as the promised King of Israel—He's called a "king" seven times. So it should come as no surprise that Matthew's genealogy (see Matthew 1:1-17) emphasizes Jesus' legal claim to the throne of David, tracing His royal descent from David and Abraham.

Matthew may have had another reason for arranging his royal genealogy the way he did. He presents the names in three sets of 14 generations each (see Matthew 1:17). In Jewish Gematria (an ancient practice that assigns a numerical value to each letter in the Hebrew alphabet), David's name (DVD in Hebrew, which has no vowels) has a value of 14 (*dalet* + *vav* + *dalet*, or $4 + 6 + 4 = 14$). Also, David is the fourteenth name listed in Matthew's genealogy. So, this was a distinctive and stylistically Jewish way to present the Lord Jesus as a royal descendant of King David and the rightful heir to the throne.

Luke's Gospel, on the other hand, was written by a physician-scientist whose purpose was to emphasize the Lord's humanity—in Luke, the Lord refers to Himself as "the Son of Man" more than 20 times. Dr. Luke's genealogy (see Luke 3:23-38) differs from Matthew's because it emphasizes the Lord's biological descent from David—and from Adam, the first man.

Doctoral dissertations have been written on the messianic genealogies, so we make no pretense of having dealt with the subject exhaustively here. There are other questions (like why two different people are listed as Joseph's father in Matthew 1:16 and Luke 3:23), but there are many possibilities and numerous theories that have been proposed to resolve them. Therefore, it is the height of arrogance and presumption when a casual reader, with only a cursory knowledge of the facts, notes the differences in these two genealogies and jumps to the conclusion that one or both of them is in error.

